

Privilege: a Game of Economic Inequality

Est. Play Time 5-15 minutes

Two to Six players, recommended for at least three.

Privilege: The Game of Economic Inequality, is a card game designed to show how the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. It is meant to lead players through the experience of the modern economic system. The players are invited to critically examine a fundamental issue in our society, and to dream up ways to change it. Written in January 2013 by Paul Vorvick, Privilege is a learning tool game that looks to provoke discussion of a nearly-invisible issue: why our financial system does not treat everyone equally.

The social good aspect of this game is twofold. First of all, the rolling randomly for money at the beginning of the game prompts discussions about why inequality exists and what its effects are. Secondly, the inclusion of the “Medical Expenses” card begins discussions of what our health care system looks like and its duty to the sick. Whenever you read this, you’re welcome to take a look at the cards and decide if anything has changed substantially enough to warrant revising the cards.

Setup:

Required materials:

- Two red dice
- Five white dice for each player
- A twelve-sided die that both marks the dealer and the number of rounds gone by.
- Printouts of all the cards you are using (See Appendix A for the recommended card list)

Sort all decks appropriately (for the base game, this means there will be a pile of Wealth cards and a pile of Loss cards). Shuffle them and place them face down in the center of the table. Place all dice in the center of the table.

The dealer is the player who has the most money in their checking account. Deal five cards to each player from the Wealth deck. Each player rolls two white dice. These become that player’s beginning dice pool for the game. Place the twelve sided die in front of the dealer at a value of twelve.

Play begins with the player to the dealer’s left.

Goal: The goal of the game is to be the last one remaining with any dice in your pool.

Order of Play:

Your turn begins when the player to your right passes you the red dice.

During your turn, you can perform any of the following actions any number of times so long as you pay the cost:

- Pay 1 to draw a card from any deck.
- Discard two cards to draw a card from any deck.
- Pay the cost of a card to play it and follow its instructions.

At the end of your turn, you must roll the two Red Dice to see if Taxes are due (see Taxes section). Once you've rolled, you may pay any number to increase the roll by that amount. After that is done, pass the red dice to the left to signal the start of the next player's turn.

Each time the Dealer passes the red dice, they decrease the number shown on the twelve sided die by one. Then all players add one to a single die they own. This is called Payday.

Dice Pool:

You will begin the game with two dice which you rolled to determine your starting dice pool. Whenever you pay a cost, you must pay it by reducing the numbers on dice in your pool. If you pay a cost or add to your pool, you can split that addition or subtraction among as many dice as you wish. If you are told to add or subtract numbers from each die, then you do the same effect for each die in your pool.

Josh has two dice in his pool at three and five. He plays Bailout Funds to increase the number on each of his dice by one. He now has one die at four and one die at six. At the end of his turn, he is Taxed and must pay one. He chooses to pay it from his highest die, giving him one die at four and one die at five. Emily forces him to pay three with Medical Expenses, and he chooses to split the burden, putting both dice at three. Finally, Emily plays Economic Collapse, causing Josh to reduce each of his dice by two, putting both dice at one.

Playing Cards:

In order to play a card, you pay the cost at the bottom of the card. As stated above, you can pay this cost from any single one of your dice or combination of your dice.

When a card is played, follow the instructions on the card. If the card is labeled Persistent, it remains in play until its condition is triggered, at which point it is discarded. The only exception to this rule is Recession!, which remains in play until removed by another card.

Taxes:

At the end of each player's turn, that player rolls the two red dice. If the number shown on those dice is equal to or greater than the number shown on the twelve-sided die, then all players are Taxed. Each player pays one.

If the number shown on the red dice is not enough to Tax all players, then the player who rolled the red dice may choose to pay any number to increase the red dice number by that amount. If this would cause the number of the red dice to equal or exceed the number on the twelve-sided die, then all players are Taxed as above.

If the player chooses not to pay any more, or the amount they pay does not cause the red dice number to meet or exceed the twelve-sided die number, then play continues without any Taxes being enacted.

Payday:

After the Dealer has taken their turn, they reduce the number shown on the twelve sided die. This happens after the red dice have been rolled. When this happens, all players add one to their dice pool.

Discard Pile:

Whenever a card is discarded, put it face up next to the appropriate deck.

Winning:

The game is won when one player still has dice in their pool and no other player does. If multiple players went out at the same time at the end of the game, whichever player had the highest number pool before going out won.

Notes:

No die can go above six or below one. If it would go above six, all additional money spills over to other dice in its location. If there is no die that can absorb the extra, it is lost. If a die would go below one, it is eliminated. The twelve sided die is exempt from this rule.

No player may transfer money to another player. The only way to move money from one player to another is through cards.

Appendix A: Recommended Card List

8 Bailout Funds

8 Consolidation

8 Consumer Confidence

4 Economic Bubble

4 Government Regulation

4 Stock Market

4 Windfall

4 Cash Advance

1 Insurance

3 Investment Banking

2 Offshore Account

3 Savings Account

2 Student Loans

5 Debt Ceiling Negotiations

4 Economic Collapse

4 Evictions

3 Medical Expenses

4 Recession

4 Repossession

4 Risky Investment

4 Round of Layoffs

4 Runaway Inflation

4 Credit Card Debt

4 Sliding Tax Scale

Design and Theme Notes:

The designer created this game to provoke discussion of the economic system. During at least one discussion, the question was raised about house rules.

House rules and adding new cards are welcomed to Privilege. However, it is good to begin a discussion about what those house rules and new cards represent. Adding new concepts to the game of Privilege represent changing the conditions under which the real-world economic systems operate. By adding new rules you are effectively legislating certain changes into effect. It is good to ask how the new rules added to the game could be created in the real world.

Multiple times, it was mentioned that Privilege is a very bleak game. That it is a game that inhibits player choice and represents a particular view of our economic system. This is intentional. Players are meant to feel that their choices are only sometimes rewarded, and that ultimately helplessness results from economic inequality.

Responding to this helplessness is not the role of the game itself. Redesigning the game to make players feel more agency and more useful ultimately would undermine the message. Adding new rules and cards to the game, however, is an outlet to fight this helplessness. Translating that newfound agency into real world activism will hopefully spur social action through learning the systems in the game itself.

Credits:

Concept and Design: Paul Vorvick

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Web Assistance: Laura E. Hall

Playtesting: David Aldhouse, Laura E. Hall, Mink Ette